

ABCS

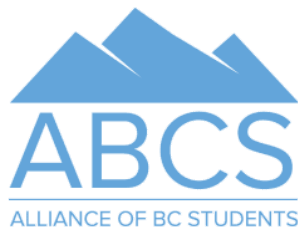
ALLIANCE OF BC STUDENTS



Submission to
**THE SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND
GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Budget 2021 Consultation**

Alliance of BC Students

Submitted June 26, 2020 *via online*



Who We Are

The Alliance of BC Students (ABCS) is a coalition of five different student associations from across British Columbia advocating at the provincial level for accessible and affordable post-secondary education in BC. Collectively, we represent over 80, 000 undergraduate, graduate, and trades students.

Our Approach

All of our priorities are decided democratically by our board of directors, with an emphasis on consensus-based decision making. We work collaboratively with all of our member associations to identify the concerns of their constituents and develop policy recommendations that are well-researched and achievable.

The work of the Alliance – including policy, research, advocacy, meeting legislators, and campaigning – is all led by student leaders. Our work is done by a team of officers and a board of directors made up of students from each of our member associations. Our advocacy accurately reflects the everyday experiences of BC post-secondary students, because that's who our leaders are.

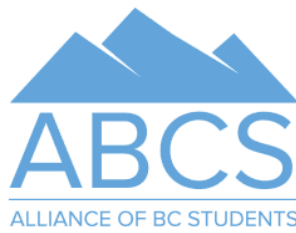
We are by students, for students.



Introduction

Our focuses have always been [accessibility and affordability](#) - making the post-secondary experience barrier-free to anyone who wishes to pursue an education. In light of the global pandemic, students and prospective students are in more precarious situations than ever before. Recent Statistics Canada data shows that 48% of surveyed students lost their jobs or were temporarily laid off due to the pandemic, and 68% of students surveyed indicated concern that their savings would be used up to cover this loss.¹ Additional survey data from the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations indicates this financial pressure has caused nearly all students to rearrange financing for the fall. Only 12% aren't making any changes, and 45% say they will be relying more on government loans.²

We believe that [moving forward, post-secondary education will be critical in BC's long term recovery](#). Research has consistently shown that expanding access to education greatly contributes to economic advancement and stability.³ As BC looks to chart a path forward after the public health emergency, we recommend approaches which strengthen BC's post-secondary sector, and meet the needs of the students who will be BC's next generation of innovators, workers, and leaders.



Overview of Recommendations

Funding for BCCampus and Open Educational Resources

The Alliance of BC Students recommends funding the continued development of open educational resources through BCCampus

Demonstrating Leadership in International Education

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Tuition Limit Policy be amended to include international student tuition, so that international tuition increases are on par with domestic student tuition increases.

The Alliance of BC Students further recommends the elimination of Medical Services Plan fees for all international students in British Columbia, in line with the same elimination of fees for all other residents of the province.

Allowing Post-Secondary Institutions to Budget a Deficit

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the provincial government allow post-secondary institutions, on a one-time-basis and in recognition of extraordinary circumstances related to COVID-19, to budget a deficit for the 2020/21 academic year.

Graduate Student Access to BC Access Grants

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the provincial government open up the BC Access Grant to include graduate students.



Funding for BCCampus and Open Educational Resources

The Alliance of BC Students recommends funding the continued development of open educational resources through BCCampus

Our first recommendation is to increase funding for open education options through BCCampus. In light of COVID-19, it's no secret that students are in more precarious financial situations.⁴⁵ For many, textbook and courseware costs could mean the difference between their ability to afford to continue post-secondary this year or not, and studies have shown a "positive relationship between the use of OER and student academic achievement".⁶ From 2012-2020, it's estimated that the use of open educational resources has saved students over \$18 million dollars⁷ - it's clear that continuing to help give faculty the tools they need to adopt open educational resources in their instruction will

"continuing to help give faculty the tools they need to adopt open educational resources in their instruction will be essential to lowering costs for students"

\$18,960,726

In student money saved in by BC using open educational resources so far!

be essential to lowering costs for students. Investing in open educational resources through BCCampus also eases the burden on instructors; faculty frequently cite the lack of supplementary courseware as a primary reason for not switching to open educational resources in their instruction. With additional funding towards open education implementation, those concerns can be meaningfully addressed, and the overall cost of post-secondary for students can be lowered.

Demonstrating Leadership in International Education

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the Tuition Limit Policy be amended to include international student tuition, so that international tuition increases are on par with domestic student tuition increases.

Now more than ever, BC post-secondary institutions are dependent on revenue from international students, and the ramifications of this have never been clearer due to the impact of the global pandemic. There is no longer a guarantee that international students

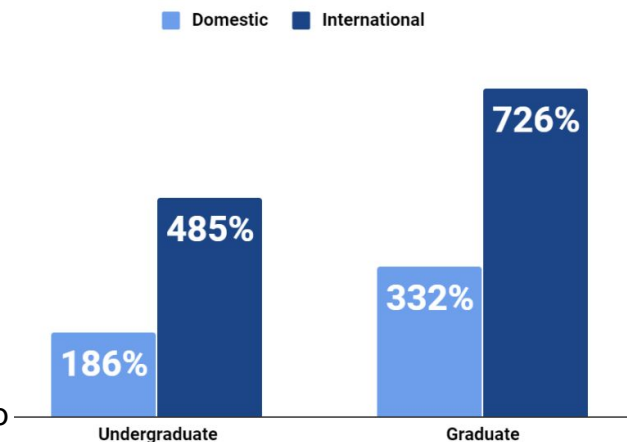
“BC must adapt to make itself the most competitive option for international education.”

will be able to continue coming to BC in the high volumes recent years have seen, and BC must adapt to make itself the most competitive option for international education. International students contributed 2.7 billion dollars to BC’s GDP in 2016, and their spending translated to 40,499 jobs across the province in the same year.⁸ BC must do what it can to protect itself from the losses it will see with a reduction in international enrollment. We recommend a pro-active, strong show of good faith towards

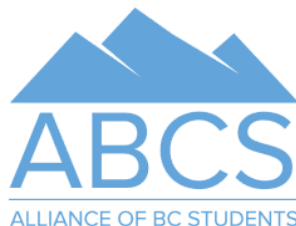
international students - policies

post-secondary recruiters can proudly tout as giving BC the leading edge over other destinations. We recommend capping the amount that international tuition can be raised year over year to 2% - the same cap that already exists for domestic students.

Tuition for international students in undergraduate programs in BC has skyrocketed since 1991,⁹ and we hear consistently from international students who are struggling to deal with the unpredictable tuition hikes they face. At UBC, the average international student tuition fee rate for a bachelor of arts degree rose almost 40% in just 3 years.¹⁰ Providing an assurance of predictability in tuition increases would give international students the ability to budget more effectively, and be fully confident in their financial situation.



Tuition Increases since 1991



Demonstrating Leadership in International Education

The Alliance of BC Students further recommends the elimination of Medical Services Plan fees for all international students in British Columbia, in line with the same elimination of fees for all other residents of the province.

We also recommend that the province consider reducing or eliminating the amount international students pay into the medical services plan. Contrary to the popular belief that international students are typically wealthy, recent surveys of student populations in

“international students experience greater rates of key indicators of financial distress, like food insecurity.” BC show that international students actually experience much greater rates of key indicators of financial distress, like food insecurity.¹¹ While MSP premiums might seem like a drop in the bucket, international students are already dealing with a number of structural barriers to financial stability. They face federal legislation which limits their ability to work off-campus to only 20 hours a week,¹² and international students also deal with discrimination in hiring practices, and may experience language barriers which make finding work more challenging.¹³

As well, it should be noted that if an international student works for a corporation which has a remuneration of higher than \$500,000, they are already counting towards payment into BC’s healthcare system, and many international students - at some institutions, the majority - work for their post-secondary institutions, which fall into the greater than \$500,000 remuneration category.

We strongly believe that implementing both of these suggestions would give BC a recruiting edge in the international educational sector, which will be critical to ensuring the financial stability of our post-secondary institutions moving forward.



Allowing Post-Secondary Institutions to Budget a Deficit

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the provincial government allow post-secondary institutions, on a one-time-basis and in recognition of extraordinary circumstances related to COVID-19, to budget a deficit for the 2020/21 academic year.

Our next recommendation is to allow post-secondary institutions to budget a deficit for the coming fiscal year. Post-secondary institutions are scrambling to find ways to balance their budgets in light of the upheaval of the pandemic, and that will undoubtedly involve tough decisions. If post-secondary institutions don't have the ability to budget a deficit, it is quite likely that students will see a reduction to the services they depend on, a reduction in course or section offerings, and layoffs, which will disproportionately impact non-unionized student employees. A study in *Procedia: Social and Behavioural Sciences* journal defined the main functions of student services at most post-secondary institutions as decreasing the university dropout rate, increasing the diversity of students' experiences, and preparing students for active participation in society.¹⁴ These are critical functions for student wellbeing, and it is essential that these services are maintained. Maintaining diverse course selection is also incredibly important to the financial health of institutions - students are already revising their plans for the Fall semester,¹⁵ and if their course options are reduced, it is quite plausible that many students may choose to defer their studies for the time being.

“if post-secondary institutions don't have the ability to budget a deficit, it is quite likely that students will see a reduction to the services they depend on”

Post-secondary education is going to be one of the keys to our economic recovery - research has shown that high rates of post-secondary education in a population lead to greater economic prosperity for everyone.¹⁶ Recovering from COVID-19 is going to take innovation, and ensuring that education is a priority will put BC in a strong position for long term recovery after the pandemic is over.



Graduate Access to the BC Access Grant

The Alliance of BC Students recommends that the provincial government open up the BC Access Grant to include graduate students.

The introduction of the BC Access Grant for low and middle income students earlier this year was incredible news for students across the province. We would like to take the opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to the government for listening to our concerns regarding student funding options and taking action - we are confident that

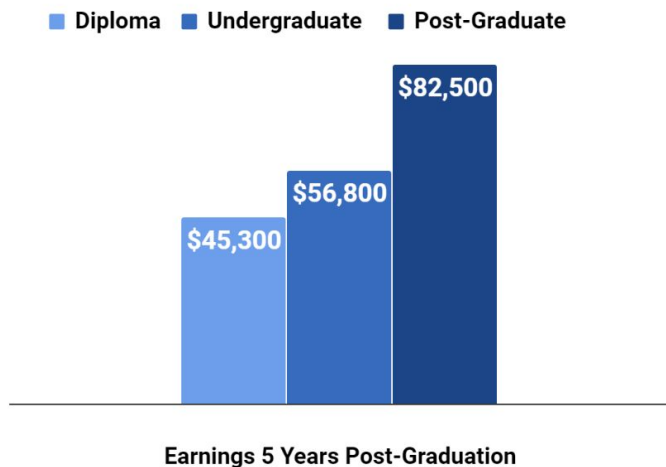
“If BC wants a skilled and competitive workforce, the province must ensure that they are investing in their greatest resource - their people.”

this program will ensure educational completion is possible for students who may have otherwise been unable to do so.

However, graduate students are not included in this program. Both provincially and federally, the only aid available for graduate students is merit-based or repayable, which does not address the needs of lower income students. For many graduate students already in debt from

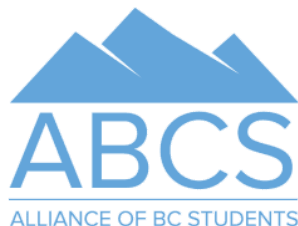
their undergraduate degree, financing a graduate degree can be prohibitive.

Approximately 10% of BC’s graduate students accessed federal student loans in 2016/17;^{17 18} there is a demonstrated need for needs-based funding in the graduate student population. All students, regardless of their study level, should be able to access needs-based funding to reduce financial barriers wherever possible in order to create a barrier-free educational experience. If BC wants a skilled and competitive workforce, the province must ensure that they are investing in their greatest resource - their people. Data shows that the pursuit of a graduate degree substantially increases an individual’s earning potential.¹⁹ If lower income students are repeatedly pushed back into the workforce by economic necessity instead of being able to finish their education to the highest level they can achieve, the full potential of their contributions to their communities and our economy might not ever be realized.



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